

Shawnee National Forest 2012 Fall Color Status for October 8th through 14th

The autumn season is one of the most popular seasons for visiting the Shawnee National Forest in southern Illinois. This region of Illinois is unique in that it is home to a variety of tree species, which in turn creates a beautiful array of fall colors. The Shawnee National Forest is relatively small compared to most national forest, however at 280,000 acres it is the largest public land holder in the state and is popular year-round for hiking, hunting, viewing scenery, camping and horseback riding.

Currently fall color conditions are occurring along the roadsides and in forest clearings. About 90% of the national forest still mostly green, but big changes are expected this week, as the cooler temperatures continue at night with daytime highs hovering in the mid-60s. Early turners such as the dogwood and sumac trees are dotting the countryside with their deep crimson leaves. While the treetops of the maples, sycamore and elm have started to turn into a blend of orange, yellow and red. It is predicted that peak season will occur around October 22nd.

If you're planning a trip, consider the following scenic drives:

1) LaRue-Pine Hills Road is located near Anna/Jonesboro area and is about 35 miles round trip from Jonesboro. The drive consists of a mixture of state, county and forest roads. The main attractions are along the winding LaRue-Pine Hills road, which leads you to the top of bluffs overlooking the Mississippi floodplain and the world-renowned LaRue-Pine Hills/Otter Pond Research Natural Area. This scenic drive also accesses Pine Hills campground, several picnic areas and a variety of local attractions (i.e., antique shops, wineries, and orchards). The general location of this drive is southwest of Carbondale, IL.

2) Ohio River National Scenic Byway transverses three states, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. The Illinois portion is approximately 300 miles and ends at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers in Cairo, IL. The Scenic Byway reflects the culture and history found along the rolling, hilly landscape of the Ohio River Valley in Illinois. It passes through the eastern portion of the Shawnee National Forest near recreation areas such as the Garden of the Gods, Pounds Hollow, High Knob, Rim Rock, Tower Rock, in addition to Cave in Rock State Park and many small historic river towns.

For more information contact the Shawnee National Forest, (618) 253-7114 or www.fs.usda.gov/shawnee or Southernmost Illinois Tourism Bureau, (800) 248-4373 or <http://southernmostillinois.com/>